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## **A CORPUS STUDY OF ENGLISH AND TATAR PROVERBS RELATED TO CATS**

**Аннотация.** Проанализированы пословицы и поговорки о кошках, в том числе их вариации, реализующие корпус современного английского и татарского языков. Целью статьи является изучение пословиц с компонентом-зоонимом «кошка/кот» с точки зрения их количественного использования. Предполагается, что изучаемые пословицы являются нефиксированными, особенно с точки зрения вариативности и синтаксической структуры.

**Ключевые слова:** пословицы, английский, Британский национальный корпус, Корпус современного американского английского языка, татарский, татарский письменный корпус, таиарский национальный корпус «Туган тел», корпусный подход, вариация, синтаксис.

**Abstract.** Proverbs and sayings about cats, including their variations, are analyzed implementing the corpora of the contemporary English and Tatar languages. The aim of the paper is to examine the given proverbs in terms of their quantitative usage. It is supposed that the studied proverbs are variable, especially in terms of formal variation and syntactic flexibility.

**Keywords:** proverbs, English, British National Corpus, Corpus of Contemporary American English, Tatar, Tatar written Corpus, corpus approach, variation, syntax.

The present study aimed to study English and Tatar proverbs and sayings related to cats. Although much has been written about proverbs, from historical, cultural, cognitive and linguistic points of view, the number of publications on animal proverbs including ones with cat names is undeservedly small. According to Krickmann, in general, researchers have mostly analyzed animals either observing the relations between proverbs and fables or while discussing references to agriculture and veterinary in proverbs [3]. As for the proverbs to be studied, being collected from lex-

icographic sources, they contain 14 English proverbs related to cats (see Table 1) and 9 Tatar cat proverbs (see Table 2).

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>A cat in gloves catches no mice</i></li> <li>2. <i>A cat may look at a king</i></li> <li>3. <i>All cats are grey in the dark</i></li> <li>4. <i>Care/Curiosity killed the cat</i></li> <li>5. <i>It is enough to make a cat laugh</i></li> <li>6. <i>Keep no more cats than will catch mice</i></li> <li>7. <i>Like a cat on hot bricks</i></li> <li>8. <i>The cat shuts its eyes when stealing cream</i></li> <li>9. <i>The cat would eat fish, but would not wet her feet\ paws</i></li> <li>10. <i>The cat, the rat, and Lovell the dog, rule all England under the hog</i></li> <li>11. <i>To let the cat out of bag</i></li> <li>12. <i>Wait for the cat to jump</i></li> <li>13. <i>Wanton kittens make sober cats</i></li> <li>14. <i>When the cat's away, the mice will play\ When the cat is away the mice play</i></li> </ol> |
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Table 1. Proverbs with cat names under study

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Алар «миңа бәләкәй сөяк бирделәр» дип үпкәләгәнче, сөяген песи алып китәр</i></li> <li>2. <i>Ачулы кешегә песи койрыгын күтәрәп йөрсә дә ярамый</i></li> <li>3. <i>Май ашаган песи күк</i></li> <li>4. <i>Мыштым мәче күбрәк май ашый</i></li> <li>5. <i>Песи сәтне күз йомып ашагач, үзен беркем дә күрми дип уйлый</i></li> <li>6. <i>Песием, песием дигәнче, перес булып китә</i></li> <li>7. <i>Тычканга – үлем, песигә–көлке</i></li> <li>8. <i>Тәуфыйклы песи дә каймак ашый</i></li> <li>9. <i>Үпкәләсәң песи үпкәсен ашатырлар</i></li> </ol> |
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Table 2. Tatar proverbs with cat names under study

The present paper describes results of a corpus study of English and Tatar proverbs and reveals the type of changes in their variations.

### **The corpus and search methodology**

The corpora upon which we have based our study are the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and Tatar written corpus, the Written Corpus of the Tatar language, the Tatar National Corpus “Tugan Tel”. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) contains more than 520 million words [2], while the British National Corpus (BNC) includes 100 million words [1]. Being designed in 2010, the Written Corpus of the Tatar language current-

ly contains over 116 million words [5]. The Tatar National Corpus “Tugan Tel” consists of more than 26 million words [4].

Since there was no fully automatic way of searching the proverbs, a list of proverbs from various lexicographical sources was made up, and then was searched in the corpora. For each proverb, we looked for one or more key words. As the experience shows, it made sense to look for the co-occurrence of all key words since proverbs often have variations. For example, in the case of the proverb *Curiosity killed the cat*, a search for the co-occurrence of any two out of the three key words were carried out. The ‘word family’ was cat OR curiosity+ killed. The above-mentioned search allowed us to retrieve variations, for example: 1) *Like a cat on hot bricks/ as a cat on hot bricks/ like a cat on hot pavement* 2) *Тычканга – үлем, песигә – көлке/ Тычканга – үлем, мәчегә – көлке*.

### Corpus findings

In all, a total of 14 English and 9 Tatar proverbs were studied, respectively. 5 of English proverbs were not found in the BNC and COCA at all, and for the 9 which were present in the corpus, frequency ranges from very high to very low. For example, the English proverb *Let the cat out of bag* has 34 coincidences, while *The cat shuts its eyes when stealing cream* and *A cat in gloves catches no mice* has 1 coincidence (see Table 1). Only 3 Tatar proverbs were found in the corpora, the other 6 were not found (See Table 4). The obtained data allow us to see how English and Tatar proverbs behave in the languages being studied.

Proverbs	Frequency
1. <i>Let the cat out of bag</i>	34
2. <i>Care/Curiosity killed the cat</i>	26
3. <i>A cat may look at a king</i>	11
4. <i>When the cat's away, the mice will play\ When the cat is away the mice play</i>	9
5. <i>Like a cat on hot bricks</i>	5
6. <i>It is enough to make a cat laugh</i>	4
7. <i>All cats are grey in the dark</i>	4
8. <i>The cat shuts its eyes when stealing cream</i>	1
9. <i>A cat in gloves catches no mice</i>	1
10. <i>Wait for the cat to jump</i>	0
11. <i>The cat, the rat, and Lovell the dog, rule all England under the hog</i>	0
12. <i>The cat would eat fish, but would not wet her feet\ paws</i>	0

13. <i>Keep no more cats than will catch mice</i>	0
14. <i>Wanton kittens make sober cats</i>	0

Table 3. Frequency of proverbs in the BNC and COCA

Proverbs	Frequency
1. <i>Тычканга – үлем, песиҗә – көлке</i>	30
2. <i>Тәуфыйклы песи дә каймак ашый</i>	0
3. <i>Май ашаган песи күк</i>	8
4. <i>Алар «миңа бәләкәй сөяк бирделәр» дип үпкәләгәнче, сөяген песи алып китәр</i>	0
5. <i>Үпкәләсәң песи үпкәсен ашатырлар</i>	0
6. <i>Ачулы кешеҗә песи койрыгын күтәрәп йөрсә дә ярамый</i>	0
7. <i>Песи сәтне күз йомып ашагач, үзен беркем дә күрми дип уйлый</i>	0
8. <i>Песиём, песиём дигәнче, перес булып китә</i>	0
9. <i>Мыштым мәче күбрәк май ашый</i>	1

Table 4. Frequency of proverbs in the Written Corpus of the Tatar language and Tatar National Corpus “Tugan Tel”

### The formal variation and flexibility of proverbs

The analysis conducted has given the opportunity to find out the variations of proverbs and sayings related to cats. We distinguish between relatively fixed variations, and variation which underwent significant changes.

#### Relatively fixed variation

There exist two main types of relatively fixed variation. Firstly, the cases of alternative forms of a proverb with slight variations in lexis or syntax were found. An example is the proverbs 1) *It is enough to make a cat laugh/ it is enough to make the cat laugh* 2) *Май ашаган песи күк/ Май ашаган песи шикелле*. Secondly, some proverbs were found divided into two parts, where only the first part is presented, for example 1) *The cat shuts its eyes (when stealing cream)* 2) *Тычканга – үлем, мәчегә... (көлке)*.

#### Variations that were changed significantly

Every proverb in some or that way depends on its context. In some cases, the proverb may have no formal change and remain fully fixed. An example from the corpus is *A cat may look at a king*, where the proverb doesn't undergo any changes.

In many cases, the context may result in changing the form of the proverb. There are two categories, which depend on the intentions of the writer to influence the reader. The first one refers to slight adaptations of a syntax, grammar or semantics, where the writer changes the proverbs unintentionally. The second is related to significant lexical and semantic

changes in which the reader understands that the writer has changed a proverb on purpose to create a particular effect.

The first of these two categories includes the following features: 1) the proverb becomes part of a dependent clause, for example, *There was no one around. The towns people had learned the hard way curiosity killed the cat – you stayed indoors if there was trouble.* Ә үзе май ашаган мәчедәй Жәмиләне күзәтте. 2) there is a change in tense or mood, for example, *When the cat's away, the mice will play\ When the cat is away the mice play .*

The second category implies significant lexical and semantical changes. The most common way was to replace a word with another word. An example from the corpus is the proverb *A gloved cat catches no mice* which was transformed from *A cat in gloves catches no mice* or *Like a cat on hot pavement* instead of *Like a cat on hot bricks*. The amount and type of change which may take place within a given proverb depends on a number of factors: semantic, lexical, structural, and syntactic characteristics of the proverb; the only thing should be taken into account is that the original proverb must still be recognizable. For instance, 1) *Care killed the cat* was changed into *Curiosity killed the cat*. 2) *Май ашаган песи күк/ Май ашаган песи шикелле/ Май ашаган мәче кебек.*

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the limitations of our study should be noted, whereas the study we carried out gave valuable information about the general ways in which English and Tatar proverbs behave in the language, the corpora consulted were large enough to determine accurately the citation forms and typical usage of individual proverbs except in a small number of cases.

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